

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 3123

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR,PINT, SP
SUBJECT: AN EVALUATION OF PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ

1. I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO GIVE MY PERSONAL
EVALUATION OF PRIME MINISTER ADOLFO SUAREZ IN
PREPARATION FOR THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH HIM
LATER THIS WEEK. DURING THE PAST TOW YEARS I HAVE
COME TO KNOW SUAREZ QUITE WELL AND I LIKE HIM. I
HAVE FOUND HIM FRIENDLY AND RESPONSIVE IN OUR
CONTACTS AND AS PRIME MINISTER HE HAS SPOKEN WITH
ME ABOUT HIS POLITICAL PLANS IN AN APPARENTLY
STRAIGHTFORWARD WAY.

2. THAT SUAREZ SHOULD HAVE BECOME THE GUIDE OF
SPAIN'S POLITICAL DESTINIES IS ALL THE MORE
REMARKABLE CONSIDERING HIS BACKGROUND. UP TO
FRANCO'S DEATH IN NOVEMBER 1975, HIS ENTIRE ADULT LIFE
(NOW 44 HE WAS TOO YOUNG TO BE IN THE CIVIL WAR) HAD
BEEN SPENT IN THE ACTIVE SERVICE OF THE FRANCO REGIME.
HIS POLITICAL EDUCATION WAS WITHIN THE REGIME "ESTABLISHMENT"
AND, AS FAR AS I KNOW, HE HAD LITTLE OR NO CONTACT WITH
OR INTEREST IN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT AND PRACTICE OF THE
WESTERN WORLD. AMBITIOUS, PRAGMATIC AND OPPORTUNISTIC,
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AND YET PERSONALLY APPEALING, HE HAD GRADUALLY MOUNTED
THE STEPS OF POWER, CAUSING FEW, IF ANY, RIPPLES AND
GAINING THE TRUST OF THE ESTABLISHMENT. HE WAS CONTENT
WITH THE AUTHORITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND THE CORPORATE
STATE. HE HAD ACCEPTED THE BARELY VISIBLE STIRRINGS
OF LIBERALIZATION BY THE REGIME IN LATE 1974, BUT
GAINED NO SPECIAL MARKS AS A "PROMOTER" OF THIS

TIGHTLY CONTROLLED OPERATION. IN CONVERSATIONS I HAD WITH SUAREZ DURING THE PERIOD OF FRANCO'S PROTRACTED AGONY IN LATE 1975 HE SHOWED FULL AWARENESS THAT FRANCO'S PASSING WOULD BY DEFINITION END FRANCOISM AND THAT THE YOUNGER GENERATION WOULD BRING ABOUT SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN THE NATURE OF THE REGIME. BUT I CANNOT SAY THAT I WAS STRUCK BY ANY DEEP DEMOCRATIC CONVICTIONS ON HIS PART OR BY ANY CLEAR IDEAS OF HIS AS TO SPAIN'S FUTURE COURSE.

3. MY OWN BELIEF IS THAT SUAREZ'S EVOLUTION TOWARD THE VIEWS HE HOLDS TODAY IS DUE TO A COMBINATION OF THREE FACTORS. THE FIRST IS HIS AMBITION AND PRAGMATISM. THE SECOND IS HIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP AND IDENTIFICATION WITH THE KING (WHICH HE BEGAN TO CULTIVATE SOME YEARS AGO AND IS NOT WHOLLY UNRELATED TO THE FIRST FACTOR). AND THE THIRD IS THE PRIME MINISTER'S OWN INCREASING REALIZATION OF THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF SPAIN, 70PERCENT OF WHOSE POPULATION IS UNDER 40 YEARS OF AGE.

4. WHATEVER MAY BE THE PRECISE REASONS FOR SUAREZ'S EVOLUTION I THINK HE HAS CONDUCTED THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER WITH SKILL, COURAGE, POLITICAL SENSE, DETERMINATION AND AN INFINITE CAPACITY FOR WORK. THESE QUALITIES PLUS HIS LATIN GOOD LOOKS, HIS RELATIVE YOUTH, HIS GIFT OF SPEECH, HIS PERSONAL APPEAL, AND, BY NO MEANS LAST, HIS SUPPORT BY A VERY POPULAR KING HAVE ALL COMBINED TO GIVE SUAREZ

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A VERY HIGH STANDING AMONG THE SPANISH PEOPLE. BY ALL ACCOUNTS HE WILL REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER AFTER THE JUNE ELECTIONS FOR A NEW BICAMERAL PARLIAMENT.

5. SUAREZ HAS TOTALLY IDENTIFIED HIMSELF WITH THE SUCCESS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REFORM OF HIS COUNTRY AND IS MOST SENSITIVE TO BOTH INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL VIBRATIONS ABOUT THE PROCESS. ALTHOUGH A CONSERVATIVE BY POLITICAL EDUCATION, HE, WITH THE KING'S BLESSING AND OFTEN MOTIVATION, IS PREPARED TO TAKE CALCULATED RISKS, SUCH AS THE RECENT LEGALIZATION OF THE LONG-OUTLAWED SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY, TO ACHIEVE HIS AIMS AND TO BRING A DEMOCRATIC SPAIN AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF THE WEST

6. SUAREZ HAS TRAVELLED VERY LITTLE AND THEN ONLY IN EUROPE (FRANCE AND PORTUGAL). THIS IS HIS FIRST VENTURE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC AND HIS FIRST CONTACT WITH AMERICAN LEADERS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL. THE TRIP TO THE US IS ENORMOUSLY IMPORTANT TO HIM

BOTH IN THE PERSONAL SENSE AND IN THE SENSE OF OBTAINING FURTHER
DEMONSTRATION OF US MORAL SUPPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION
PROCESS AND OF THE CLOSENESS OF US-SPANISH RELATIONS. I EXPECT
THAT HE WILL BE INTENT TO GIVE TO THE PRESIDENT A SUCCINCT AND
HOPEFULLY REALISTIC APPRAISAL OF THE TREND, PRESENT AND FUTURE,
OF THE REFORM PROCESS AND OF THE OBJECTIVNESS OF SPANISH FOREIGN
POLICY IN THIS NEW ERA.STABLER

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